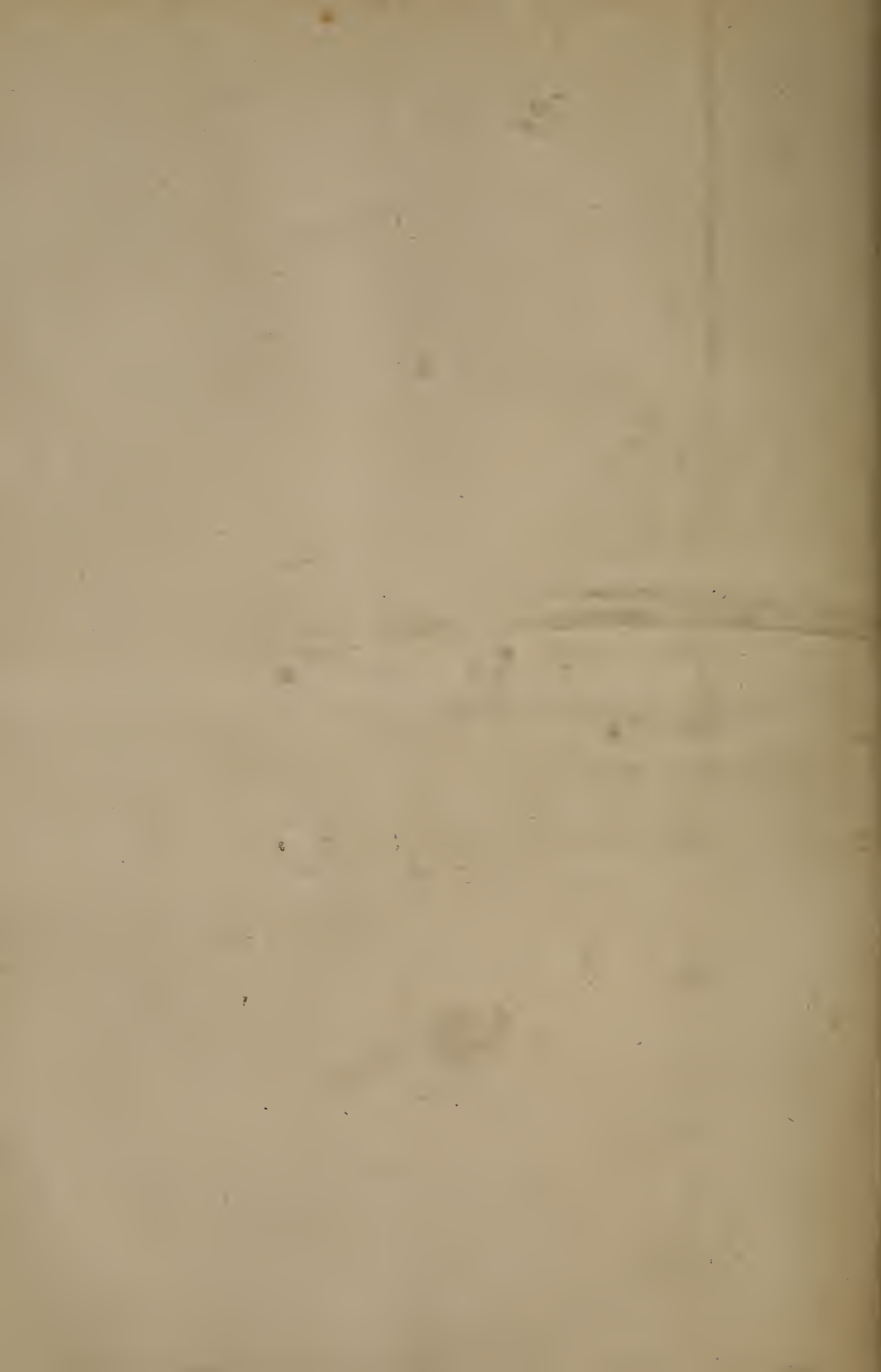




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OXFORD DIOCESAN CONFERENCE,
1879.

JUSTICE FOR VOLUNTARY SCHOOLS.

PAPER READ

BY THE

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OXFORD DIOCESAN CONFERENCE,

2nd October, 1879.

JUSTICE FOR VOLUNTARY SCHOOLS.

RESOLUTION MOVED BY J. G. HUBBARD.

“ That grave injustice and infraction of religious liberty are involved in the operation of the Education Act, when a rate levied upon a school district comprising Voluntary and School Board Schools is unshared by Voluntary Schools, which, discharging the primary duty of definite religious training, have also proved their efficiency as Public Elementary Schools by the Parliamentary Grant which they have carried.

The Resolution which I ask leave to move is, I venture to say, incontestable; but desiring that this conference should not only affirm its truth, but feel that its affirmation is expedient, I invite their attention to the events which, within a quarter

of a century, have led to the present state of education.

Twenty-five years since a great movement was in progress. Rapidly outstripping the educational powers of the older religious endowments, the expanding labouring population required for its instruction, not only individual and voluntary efforts, but the substantial assistance of the State. Responsively to this requirement Parliamentary Grants were largely supplied to the furtherance of voluntary efforts originating in a spirit of religious philanthropy, which laboured for its beneficent purpose with ungrudging liberality.

Educational means under the voluntary system were provided under the conviction that "Education was a *religious work*," and thus while the State stimulated and suggested voluntary efforts, it left the work of education to the various religious agencies, to be carried on by each in accordance with its conscientious persuasion, but requiring as the lowest qualification in every assisted School that in addition to secular instruction the Scriptures be daily read in the authorized version.

Religious instruction was in fact an indisputable element in "*Education*."

But the year 1859 was signalized by the appointment as Vice-President of the Education Department of the Rt. Hon. Robert Lowe. Mr. Lowe disapproved of all denominational school teaching, and he conceived it to be his duty as

Vice-President of the Educational Department not to expend the monies voted by Parliament as grants in aid upon their intended object, but to obstruct by every possible discouragement the provision of Voluntary Schools. Supposing that from a certain town concurrent applications were made for a National School and a British School, it became the rule to refuse both, and to say to Churchmen and Dissenters "Drop your differences" and provide instead of two, a single school, which "will be not only more economical but more efficient." Economy is a virtue, and religious differences are regrettable, but those differences do exist, or we should not see in our towns Chapels in which gather for worship those who in the exercise of their rightful liberty separate themselves from the communion of the Church.

In the exercise of that same liberty Dissenters are entitled to educate their youth in accordance with their own convictions, and it was insulting and injurious alike to Churchmen and Dissenters to punish them for trying to discharge what they thought was a religious work, each according to their sense of duty. Excellent as is economy in itself, it cannot be allowed to outweigh religious liberty or conscience, yet, to the Education Department, ruled by Mr. Lowe, these considerations, doubtless, seemed pure superstition. At all events, under him economy reigned supreme, and the building grants which in 1859 were £137,000 were gradually reduced to £19,000. //

When discouragement and insult have done their worst, and the progress of educational work had been brought to a stand-still, a new school of educationists arose, who, declaring the Voluntary School system to be a failure, organized an agitation for the construction of a new system, which should be "universal, rate supported and compulsory." When the Government introduced the Education Act this party succeeded in materially changing the character of the measure, and to its intervention is mainly due the more objectionable features of the Act.

Previous to the passing of the Act, the Elementary Schools throughout the country were, for the most part, connected with either the National Society (representing the Church) or the British and Foreign School Society (representing the Dissenters), and wherever any large Dissenting congregations existed Schools of both kinds were also found.

The Education Act divided all England into School Districts, and each district was warned that it must provide any School accommodation which might be deficient, failing in which a School Board would be formed, with powers to build and conduct Schools, and to provide funds for their expenditure by rates levied over the whole district. In obedience to the law, Churchmen made great exertions and provided very generally the additional accommodation which should exclude a deficiency and

avert the calamity of a School Board. In 1869, the places provided in Church Schools were 1,300,000, in 1878 they were 2,252,794, showing an increase of 70 per cent. in eight years.

The increased accommodation in Church Schools would have been still more striking but for the surrender by their managers of 525 Church Schools to the School Board of their district. These surrenders—few I thankfully observe in comparison with the entire number—exemplify the process which in its complete and successful course is prophetically hailed by the secularists as the “painless extinction” which would leave the Birmingham system in possession of the whole country. If greater progress has not been made towards the confiscation of Voluntary Schools it is not from the want of formidable means of aggression. To some extent School Boards are under the control of the Education Department; but they have and they exercise powers inconsistent with the rights of the community at large.

School Boards may at their discretion—

1. Hire and furnish School Buildings.
2. Tempt teachers from other Schools by profuse salaries.
3. Draw children not only from the streets and fields, but from other Schools by minimising fees or by remitting fees altogether.
4. Rate the district for the amount of their arbitrary expenditure, however large.

Where a district contains no other than School Board Schools, the existence of these unlimited powers must be a source of danger; but where, as usually occurs, the School Board School is but one of many, the others being Voluntary Schools, the exercise of these powers becomes a flagrant injustice and a crushing oppression. Crushing, I say, emphatically, because it is impossible for a Voluntary School to exist when rates levied without limitation on its own supporters are applied to bribe away both teachers and pupils.

Is this collapse of Voluntary Schools a consummation to be wished for? Secularists would say yes; this Conference, I feel certain would say no, and I shall offer some reasons why this verdict should be echoed through the country.

1. The School Board system is very much more costly. The instructional expenditure per child is in School Board Schools £2 1s. 10*d.*, and in Voluntary Schools only £1 14s. 11*d.*

2. This extravagant expenditure of School Boards accomplishes no proportionate results, for the efficiency of instruction as tested by the grant earned by the scholar proves to be 15s. 2*d.* in the Voluntary Schools, and 15s. 1*d.* in the far more costly and expensive Board Schools.

3. The School Board system is inimical to the religious character which ought to pervade every educational establishment. I do not say that a School Board School may not (if the Managers

so will) convey practically the fullest doctrinal teaching that could be desired; but the occasions are few on which this can happen, for the mode of electing the School Board gives every facility for the introduction of discordant elements, so that even in the face of a decided majority the hostile exception has the power of cavilling, teasing, opposing and thwarting the action of the majority until for peace and quietness the struggle ends by eliminating any even the most essential truths of Christianity, if objected to, from the course of School instruction. Where, indeed, the Secularist principle is, as at Birmingham, in the ascendant, we are pained by the spectacle of all religious teaching by the School teacher being strictly prohibited.

But here again we have been met by the allegation that "religious instruction" may be had by those who care for it on Sundays and from professed religious teachers—but that Public Elementary Schools must be "undenominational" and secular as they could not otherwise be "compulsory."

This we are told is the character of the Public Schools of the Continent and of Northern America, and if we desire to keep abreast of the rest of the World we must educate our people as the World does.

As Englishmen—my Lord, we are ready to learn, but are not prepared without scrutiny to surrender our laws and customs for no other reason

than that they are at variance with those of other countries.

I find nothing in the experience of other countries to attest the superiority of the undenominational or secular system in public elementary instruction.

In North America it is notorious that the common school system, whether in the United States or in Canada, has so deteriorated the morals of the young that the more earnest religionists, whatever their denomination, have been compelled at great sacrifice to establish special schools for the children of their own communion.

How is the state education of France affecting its moral, social and political future? A letter from Paris, in the *Pall Mall* of 26th August last (under the title Educated Adventurers), depicts in striking language the dangers flowing from a system which rears an enormous class of men over-instructed for their own position and swelling the ranks already over-crowded of men struggling for wealth, and unrestrained by conscience. "When
 " (says the writer) one reflects that the thousands
 " of young men who covet the position of *petit*
 " *rentier* are joined annually by 20,000 young
 " recruits fresh from the schools and with all
 " their talents whetted according to the newest
 " systems for the social fray, one cannot wonder at
 " the large number of well educated young men
 " who find their way into gaols. The last Annual

“ Report of the Ministry of Justice dwells upon the
 “ increasing number of well educated persons who
 “ are imprisoned for offences against property ; and
 “ one may add that for offences against life as well
 “ as in swindling, the highly trained young men
 “ who have been through the best ‘ *lycees* ’ are
 “ quite equal to the uncultured rough.” The letter
 concludes thus, “ the present system of education
 “ in France leads to the creation of an annually
 “ increasing body of citizens whose profession will
 “ be to war on society and who, politically speaking,
 “ will be ready for anything.” That is a frightful
 picture ; but look at Germany ; look at Belgium.
 The same results of Godless education will be
 observed wherever the conflict between Secularism
 and the earnest Religionists striving for the liberty
 of religious teaching, terminates in the ascendancy
 of an educational system compelling the attendance
 of differing denominations and conducting their
 instruction with tranquillity, because religion which
 should be its life is altogether wanting.

In our own country, happily, the feeling of the
 people revolts from this lifeless uniformity pur-
 chased by the denial of God’s truths to the immor-
 tal souls of children, and in the majority of School
 Boards attempts have been made to escape the
 reproaches of godless teaching by teaching what is
 called undogmatic religion. As “ dogma ” is the
 affirmation of religious truth, this attempt if it
 could succeed would reduce religious instruction to

a mere name, a hollow and unmeaning pretence. It is the conflicting views inseparable from the election of its members which impels School Boards either to refuse all religious instruction or so to hamper the teacher with prohibitions and restraints that he can never impart religious lessons with the earnestness which alone commands success.

That to confine the work of education to secular instruction is a mistake seems to be admitted now even where the admission would be least expected. The Birmingham School Board by the voice of Mr. Dixon have expressed dissatisfaction with the results of their own contrivance, and have actually suggested that "morality" should be inculcated in their schools, though with strict avoidance of an appeal to the authority of that God from whom alone all morality and all good works proceed.

Mr. Lowe, also in the course of the last Session of Parliament, admitted the failure of undenominational education. Whether the failure was to be lamented as a political disaster or as a discredit to Secular Philosophy does not appear, but these avowals coming from conspicuous champions of Secularism encourage one more hopefully to wage with unshrinking resolution the good fight for education as a religious work.

It is curious to remark how signally the economical longings of Mr. Lowe have been thwarted by the success of his own subtlety ; he paralysed the

progress of Voluntary School provision, and prepared for the Education Act of 1870, and with what pecuniary results? The Public Expenditure in Education Grants which he had succeeded in screwing down to one million and a quarter, last year exceeded four millions and a quarter.

This enormous expenditure is mainly attributable to the extravagance of School Boards which has attracted the disapproval both of the ratepayer and of the Government, who in times of financial pressure are apt to look anxiously on so enormous and progressive an expenditure. Indeed, some alarm has been created by Lord G. Hamilton's warning that the Government annual grants might be re-adjusted, as implying that their amount might be reduced. I cannot think this possible, for the Government must know that the Voluntary Schools, already strained to the utmost in their unequal contest, would be seriously injured by a general reduction of the Annual Grant, while to the Board School no diminution of the Grant could be a penalty, for the deficiency of means arising from such a cause would be supplied by a heavier rate which it would levy on the whole School District, including the supporters of the Voluntary School.

Regard for the national finances no less than religious solicitude and fair play, demands that any change in the present administration of educational funds be directed to the encouragement and not to the oppression of Voluntary Schools. Their

position is a striking evidence of enlightened religious earnestness.

The entire school accommodation is now stated at 3,900,000 places, of which 900,000 are owned by School Boards and 3,000,000 are due to Voluntary efforts. The cost of these 3,000,000 places is estimated at £16,400,000, and, as the State contributed £1,760,000, the residue, £14,640,000, was provided by private liberality.

So disproportionate is the cost of education through School Boards that (as stated by Lord G. Hamilton), if there were no Voluntary Schools in the country, the School Boards would be levying £6,750,000 in rates alone, and as the amount raised by rates last year was £1,103,679, the voluntary system saved the Ratepayers in one year no less than £5,646,321.

Statistical proofs of the economical advantage of Voluntary Schools may satisfy some who cannot appreciate the higher motive which ought to decide their treatment. Religious liberty largely professed has been signally disregarded in the matter of schools, but it must be vindicated. The error has grown out of the delusion that religion was a superfluity and as a luxury was to be obtained by those who wanted it, as best they might. If religion be a superfluity in the school it is equally so in the chapel, and this the secularist would cheerfully admit; but secularism is not the national sentiment. The national sentiment is religious, and the very

existence of sects is evidence at once of devotional earnestness and of independence carried to excess in the act of separation. But we accept the facts and should make it our aim that religious liberty be respected not only in the chapel but in the school. Sir James Kaye Shuttleworth presiding at the opening of a Wesleyan School said to the congregation, "You have done well, the school should "be always the adjunct to the chapel." Wise and true words. Education is a life's work, for education is training for time and for eternity, and religion should elevate and refine it in all its stages. The liberty which Englishmen have for the teaching of their churches and chapels they are equally entitled to claim for the teaching of their schools, and I notice with pleasure that within the last two or three years the exertions of the Wesleyans in providing schools for the children of their own community has become a prominent feature in the Educational Returns.

I sum up the facts and arguments which may induce the Conference to give an unanimous and hearty assent to my resolution.

Voluntary schools are at least as efficient as Board Schools, even in secular instruction they are conducted less expensively, because they engage a large amount of unpaid labour—effective because given heartily for conscience sake.

Voluntary Schools as they are harmoniously conducted impart religious instruction with the

success ensured by earnest teachers expressing their own conviction--a success which cannot attend the formal lessons of teachers whose convictions, if they have any, must be suppressed, and whose every word must be guarded lest it infringe the limits assigned by a contentious Committee to the school religion of 1870.

Voluntary Schools placing religion in the front of their system can train children more adequately even for their secular duties by supplying them with motives and principles which makes them useful citizens as well as good men.

Waiving however any argument based upon the superiority of religious education I claim in the name of religious liberty relief from the disadvantage and danger which beset Voluntary Schools. It is not for me on this occasion to say how that relief should be afforded. I am content to-day to take the primary step of proving that a grievance does exist, and when this conviction is brought home to the national legislature the remedy will not be hard to find.



